

## Narrative by Henrietta McKee Carter

### Memories of September 11

I awakened at my usual 6am time that morning, using my radio as an alarm clock. The first news item I heard, as I was getting ready for my 7am aquatics class was about two planes having deliberately flown into the World Trade Towers. I ran down the hallway in my nightgown to check the TV news, which I rarely watch, and had the worst confirmed by the bizarre, unspeakable images on every channel. The scope of the attack broadened with stories coming in from other geographical points, some of which turned out to be inaccurate. One of my first thoughts was of friends living in New York City, one of whom worked very close to the World Trade Towers.

I awoke my son who was not up yet to inform him of the events, and told my other son and my daughter-in-law as they were bringing their two sons downstairs for the morning. My 5-year-old grandson was preparing for school. I felt guilty and irresponsible for having had to tell his parents in his presence about the events, and having the TV on. Thankfully my grandson could understand only that two planes had crashed. (Prior to this event, as a family we routinely were avoiding most news telecasts in his presence because they have become too graphic, and at other times because they are too trivial. This was very graphic and far from trivial.)

One of the things that struck me as we conversed about the tragedies was this: we all suddenly stopped talking and looked at our newest family member, my other grandson, only 12 days old, sleeping peacefully in his mother's arms. I think the same thought must have passed through all of our minds simultaneously: in what kind of world will he grow up? Even though he was unusually large for a newborn, having been born at 11 pounds 4 ounces and 23 inches long, and so strong that the obstetrics nurses commented

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on his strength, he was and still is very tender and innocent. One wishes that children everywhere could have that luxury.

I have been told that the 21st century will be a scary time in which to live. Is this the beginning of a century-long nightmare? As a nation, we have been as innocent as babies ourselves about much that has gone on in the world. It is distressing to learn that certain of our governmental and corporate entities have joined in terrorizing and oppressing peoples of the world when it suited their purposes, whether the intentions were well-meaning or not. It is frightening to know that we as a nation are partially responsible for some of the hate that is coming at us.

There is far more at stake here than an “assault on our freedoms”, and other notions that get pulled out whenever someone out there attacks us. Why have we been so insular that we have allowed our press (and media) to lose its role as the fourth estate, failing to report the grievances worldwide that have arisen from actions of our governmental and corporate entities? Why do we send abroad as entertainment the most distasteful images of ourselves that are an affront to the sensibilities of others and portray us in the worst possible light? Why do so few of our young people not know where to find Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan on a map? Why have we failed to educate ourselves about what matters to others in the world? What makes us think we are bulletproof? Some of my colleagues have said repeatedly that many of our students don't know their own history. As the saying goes, those who don't know history are condemned to repeat it. This is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs.

This situation reminds me a bit of a science fiction film the title of which, I believe, was “The Forbidden Planet”. If I remember correctly, invisible “monsters” were threatening inhabitants of a community on a distant planet, discovered by explorers from Earth. Great invisible barriers were erected using all of the technology the inhabitants could muster. It turned out that the monsters were the products of the minds of the inhabitants, arising from frightening, unacceptable thoughts and emotions that these people had

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refused to acknowledge. It seems that we need to do more soul-searching in many areas, personal, communal and national, because there is much that we need to acknowledge and understand about ourselves, our communities, our nation, and how we interact with the rest of the world.

Of course we are not entirely to blame for what has happened, but we do bear some responsibility for the creation of the monster that has turned on us. Our responsibility now is to not remain ignorant about the rest of the world and our impact on it, and not to engage in knee-jerk blind reactions to hostility directed at us. Of course we should defend ourselves. I pray that in our fear, anger and grief we don't create another monster in a backlash as we attempt to destroy this one.

And, yes, we did learn that our friend whose office was destroyed by the explosion at the second World Trade Center Tower made it home safely; for that my family and his are eternally grateful.